CHRISTMAS STORIES! CHRISTMAS STORIES!!
CHRISTMAS STORIES!!!

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 313.] FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 29, 1894. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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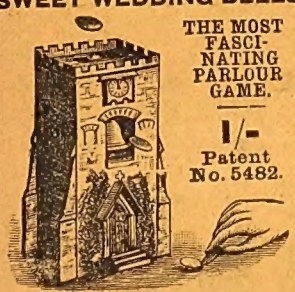

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 313.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 29, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

SANTA CLAUS.

A TALE OF THE FRANCO GERMAN WAR.

I.

PERHAPS it is rather a curious Christmas story after all.

Old Captain Rolland, the marine officer who was in charge of my division, and who was noted for his vigilance, had sent us forward on outpost duty along the Doubs river as far as Plommecy, twelve leagues or so from Besançon. We had been on the march all day, part of the time along the towing-path, where a foot of snow was lying, part of it on wide cross-roads, which troops of cattle had changed to so many rivers of mud.

Thanks to the winding of the river, in spite of all our short-cuts, it was close on nightfall when we reached Plommecy. Our fatigue had reduced us to a dull silence, as we tramped slowly along with the heavy, regular swing of weary troops. Every now and then a man hitched his knapsack up with a jerk of the shoulders. An old smuggler, whom we called "The Sapper," in allusion to his heavy beard, was the only man who kept a little gaiety, and was able to jest. He retained the light but firm step with which he had begun the day, and from under a moustache full of icicles he hummed the eternal refrain of an old marching song:

"My coat has two buttons,
March along, march along;
My coat has three buttons
Gaily march along."

We regained a little of our former energy as we drew near Plommecy. On the distant river bank in front of us the snow-covered roofs were visible as great white spots upon the background of a grey December sky.

"Come, my lads," said the Sapper, "put your legs into it!" and he struck up another ditty:

"There's lots of drink ahead of us, lads,
There's lots of drink ahead!"

The detachment began to double as if by one accord.

As for the Prussians, they never came into our thoughts. We had been out looking for them since morning, and had not seen a solitary uniform.

All the same we began to think of them when we came to the outskirts of the village. There was no movement in it; not a light to be seen, and a silence of the dead. It occurred to us that it was just possible that we were walking into a Prussian ambuscade. Each man changed his chassepot from half to full cock, and brought the trigger within easy reach of his finger. Tired legs recovered their elasticity; stiffened backs grew supple enough to crouch behind walls, and so we entered the end of the village street, ready to find rest from our day's march in a night of fighting.

"By Jove! the place is a graveyard!" someone said. "Suppose we knock at this door. The inhabitants will tell us what is afoot. At any rate we shall find someone to speak to, even if they answer us with lead."

He knocked at the door. No one answered. Someone knocked at the next door, with the same result When we tried the third, our lieutenant kicked at the lower panel with al his strength. The door gave way before the shock, and he entered the house, revolver in hand. Ten men followed him. The other five of us waited in the street to keep watch for an attack.

In three minutes, our comrades emerged with anxious faces and the news that the house was empty. The next and next that we tried were standing open. It was the same everywhere; the village was deserted.

"Diable! diable!" said our lieutenant. "The Prussians must have passed through here while we were watching the waters of the Doubs. The peasants must have taken refuge at Haume. We shall have to keep a sharp look-out to-night."

He proceeded to place a sentinel at each end of the street, and a third upon a cross-alley that led out to the open country. The rest of us followed him to a farmhouse that seemed the

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chief building of the village, in order that we might cook our supper and prepare the night's lodging.

But our leader had scarcely opened the yard-gate when all our suspicions were confirmed. It was here that the Prussians had had their quarters. We could see marks of their presence in the over-turned water-trough, the hay so prodigiously taken from the barn and littered about the stable, the burst door of the cellar, and the empty bottles scattered among the straw on which the troops had evidently passed the night in the yard, their officers sleeping in the house.

Three bounds carried us indoors. There was no longer room for doubt. A table littered with dirty plates, half-emptied glasses, wine-bottles with their necks broken off, all bore witness to a gluttonous orgie. In the fire-place, a huge heap of logs, piled up on top of one another, was still burning. The bed was in disorder of the wildest description. Muddy boots had left their marks on the sheets of fine white linen.

Whilst our lieutenant was considering if there was no possibility of successfully pursuing the villains, the Sapper, who had gone off to rummage the stables, and see if he could light upon a few eggs, called to us suddenly from across the yard. We all hastened to the sound of his voice.

The Sapper was endeavouring to comfort a little fellow of some twelve or thirteen years, who was weeping as if his heart would break. He had picked the child up in his arms, and kissed him, smothering his sobs in his great beard. As we came up he was saying:

"I promise you we'll catch them. Don't cry, laddie. You shall have one of them to kill yourself."

He entered the house, revolver in hand

We could not understand what was the matter. But the officer found and lit a lantern. As its light suddenly illuminated the stable, the whole story became clear. Two bodies were lying in a corner near the rack, a man and a woman. Behind them on the wall were spread two large splashes of blood and brains. The two corpses were holding each other by the hand.

"Father! mother!" wailed the little fellow, without heeding the Sapper's attempts at consolation. At the sight of us, however, he grew quieter, and was able finally to tell us the story of his misfortune. The peasants had left the village three days before at the news of the Uhlans' approach. His father and mother had been the only ones willing to stay. The Prussians had come and plundered everything.

At the moment of their departure, his father had not been able to refrain from insulting the officer in command of them. The officer had struck the old man, who had sprung at him, and tried to throttle him. Then the Prussian had ordered the man and woman to be dragged into the stable, and had himself blown out their brains with his revolver.

"Oh! I shall know him again, the brigand," cried the child; "and I'll kill him when I see him!"

Then he suddenly turned to our lieutenant and asked:

"Will you take me for one of your volunteers?"

The officer saw that to refuse would be to plunge the child into despair, and thought that it would always be time enough to show him the absurdity of his desire when his grief was appeased. So he answered simply:

"Yes."

"Then give me a gun and I'll go with you to kill Prussians."

"I have not a single spare rifle, my good boy," answered the lieutenant. "Come with us to Besançon. We can find you one there."

The child, a little consoled by this promise, allowed himself to be taken to the fireside in the kitchen whilst we buried his parents as well as we could. The next day he returned with us. At the end of five or six leagues he was utterly worn out with fatigue. The Sapper put him astride of his own knapsack to the end of the day's march, and marched gaily along with his light, firm step, still humming his interminable refrain:

"My coat has a hundred buttons,
March along, march along.
My coat has a hundred and one buttons,
Gaily march along."

II.

The next day and the next again the child spent in our company, and no one could muster courage to tell him that volunteers of thirteen were not accepted. Each day he became more urgent in his demand of a gun, and grew more vexed that he was not already clothed and armed like a soldier.

"If you were ordered off to-morrow," he said, "I should not be ready, and you wouldn't take me with you."

That was on Christmas Eve. We had planned to have a little feast of a kind in the house of the good fellow who boarded ten of us in the Chaprais suburb of Besançon. The child was to be with us. Our gaiety might cheer him up. So we sent him to bed at seven, and promised to wake him up at midnight.

At half-past eleven I arrived, a little ahead of the rest. I went up to the room in which the child was asleep, so as to leave the dining-room free to Mother Gaudot, who was preparing the supper, and my light did not wake him. It was cold in the room, and I looked mechanically towards the fire-place.

Behold the strength of habit! The child had forgotten his grief for a time, and had hung up his stockings over the chimney-piece, as he was accustomed to do in the good days when Santa Claus never failed to bring the Christmas presents.

The poor little fellow had no idea that, his mother being dead, Santa Claus was dead too. He was quite hopeful, and had fallen asleep to wait tranquilly for the gifts of Providence.

What a miserable waking he would have! To be thus, as it were, abandoned by heaven would put the last touch to his

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woes. His parents were slain, and he was alone in the world, and now Santa Claus had forgotten him, too. The orphan was bound to feel himself doubly orphaned.

The Sapper was endeavouring to comfort a little fellow.

Of a sudden an idea came into my head. I turned and rushed downstairs.

"Mother Gaudo," I cried, "the child is asleep upstairs. Try and see that no one wakes him before I come back. Tell the other fellows that it is for his sake. Wait till I come before you begin supper."

I ran as fast as I could to the armoury, where I knew one of the guards. At a few minutes past the stroke of midnight I was back again. All the rest were waiting for me.

"Hollo, what is the meaning of this?" cried the Sapper.

"Let me pass, you fellows," I answered, hiding my burden under my greatcoat. "The lad is not awake, I hope?"

"Not he, parbleu!"

I crept upstairs as softly as I could, without confiding my errand to anyone.

"Now," I cried, as I entered the dining-room again, "call him if you like, but don't go up."

They called and hammered on the ceiling. In less than a minute the child appeared, radiant and smiling, in his night-shirt, with a shako on his head, and a cartridge-pouch girded about his waist. In his hand he brandished a short cavalry carbine.

"Merry Christmas!" he cried. "See what a fine gun Santa Claus has brought me!"

III.

The next day we were ordered off on an expedition. Four days later we fell in with the Prussians near Belfort, and a skirmish ensued.

It was early in the day on the outskirts of a forest. The mist that clung about the underwood was torn here and there by the flashes of rifles. We could hardly see the enemy. Of a sudden our little volunteer uttered a loud cry:

"There he is! there he is! I see him! There, behind the big oak."

He pointed at a tree standing by itself in a clearing, behind which, in fact, we seemed to see a horseman moving. The boy had recognised the officer of Uhlans. He rushed forward too hastily from his shelter. His spring left him uncovered, and he fell with a bullet in his breast. The officer had brought him down with his revolver.

"You coward!" cried the Sapper. And he brought his rifle to his shoulder with a steady hand. Crack! the officer's horse fell with a broken foreleg, and dragged its master down below it.

PEARSON'S PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTFOLIO

OF

FOOTLIGHT FAVOURITES.

The Second Part was Published

On THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20th,

AND IS

TWICE AS GOOD AS PART I.

CONTENTS:—

Miss Agnes Huntington: A Reminiscence of "Paul Jones."
Mr. Henry Irving as Matthias in "The Bells."
Miss Mimi St. Cyr: A Study.
Miss Ellaline Terriss as Cinderella.
Miss Julia Neilson in "The Tempter."
Miss Jessie Preston as Little Jack Sheppard.
Madame Patti: A Study.
Miss Maude Adams in "The Masked Ball."
Miss Millie Hylton in "Don Juan."
Mr. Fred Storey in "Ruy Blas," and "Cinder-Ellen Up Too Late."
Miss Mary Ansell.
Miss Alice Lethbridge.
Mr. E. S. Willard in "The Middleman."
Madame Jane Hading.
Miss Janet Achurch.
Miss Marie Tempest as Manon.
Miss Loie Fuller as a Skirt Dancer.
Miss Moore in "Little Christopher Columbus."
Miss Billie Barlow as Little Boy Blue.

NOTE THIS:—Part I. was sold out almost on publication, and many would-be purchasers could not obtain a copy. Part II. will sell out even quicker. Buy your copy at once.

33 BEAUTIFUL PHOTOGRAPHS FOR SIXPENCE.

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"Forward! Avenge our little comrade!" cried the Sapper.

We covered the clearing at the double. The Prussians, seeing their leader down, gave way before us. The Sapper was the first to reach the dismounted officer, and received a bullet in his shako.

"Fire away, old fellow!" quoth he, as he gripped the Prussian's wrist with a hand of steel. The four remaining chambers of the revolver emptied themselves harmlessly in the air, and the Sapper, flinging his prisoner to the earth, put his knee on the officer's chest.

"Bring the lad along?" he cried. At that moment the lad was in the throes of the death agony.

"It's impossible," someone cried, "he's dying."

"Sacrebleu!" cried the old smuggler, "he shall not leave us without his bit of satisfaction."

Seizing the Prussian round the waist, and keeping his arms fast behind his back, the Sapper carried him bodily off to where the boy was dying. The child smiled feebly, and life seemed to come back to him.

"Coward! coward!" he gasped.

We had placed him with his back against a tree. The Sapper forced his prisoner to kneel in front of him.

"Kill him, my lad! Come, kill him! You know I promised you you should."

The boy fumbled weakly at his carbine, which was lying on the earth between his legs. Suddenly a convulsive movement seized him. Throwing all his remaining strength into one last effort, he brought the stock up to his wounded bosom, pointed the barrel at the German's face, and pulled the trigger as his eyes were closing. The officer's brains were scattered on the ground. As for the boy, he was quite dead when we lifted him.

"Poor little fellow!" said the Sapper, swallowing a lump in his throat. "In spite of everything, he had a fine Christmas present!"

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MATTSPELLE: A SWEDISH CHRISTMAS STORY

EARLY one morning a light gleamed in the barn chamber. Mattspelle, who had risen a half-hour earlier than usual, had lighted a bit of candle stuck in a bottle, and stood arranging his hair before a cheap little looking-glass, hung on the window sash. It was Christmas eve and he must look his best.

He had a most obstinate shock of tow hair. On weekdays it stood out in all directions round his calm, good-natured face, with its round cheeks and light blue, absent-minded eyes. On Sunday, cold water was brought into use; the mat lay in order only as long as it was wet, and then it was the old story again.

But on holidays it occasionally happened that Mattspelle looked really tidy, for he had procured some tallow wherewith to anoint his locks, and for several days afterwards his hair shone so that it was hard to tell what was its original colour. To-day he combed and brushed, and brushed and combed, until not only his hair but his face shone.

He was glad that it was Christmas Eve. He thought of the porridge and ham and all the good things, and of the presents which the master and mistress never failed to provide for their servants.

He was in luck to get such a good place with Mr. Stenstrom. It was a year last summer since he had come here, and he might have come sooner if he had only been confirmed. For two years he had tried in vain. He was so stupid; he could scarcely answer a single question. The third year it was the same way, with regard to questions, but this time he knew something—he could repeat the catechism from cover to cover. If he were asked how many persons there were in the Trinity, he blinked from under his tow head and said not a word. But if someone started him on the catechism, he could rattle on like running water. So he was confirmed, for surely no one could deny that he knew his catechism.

In spite of this, however, it was hard to see any growth of intelligence in Mattspelle. He was not quick nor bright, but he was strong as a full-grown man, and did what he was told, as a soldier obeys orders. If he were sent to tar a boat, he tarred it both outside and in, for no one had told him where to stop; and if his master bade him shut the door tight, he would slam it so that the glass almost cracked. He was a conscientious fellow.

The bell rang at one o'clock. On Christmas Eve, everyone, old and young, master, mistress, and servants, had lunch together, and dipped bread in the gravy.

The kettle was in the kitchen, which had been decorated for the occasion. Chopped evergreen was strewed on the floor, and branches of it were all about the room. The shelves holding the burnished coppers were decked out with fancy paper; fresh white cloths were spread over the tables.

The kettle was there in which the Christmas ham had been cooked, and here everyone came up to dip his slices of bread and lift them out on to small plates. On the tables were ham and sausages and potatoes and Christmas ale. One could well satisfy himself with these, and the rest was kept for supper.

At present no one seemed to want anything else. The slices vanished as if they were candy, and the children would scarcely leave off eating them. They pushed and crowded each other, and played boats with their bread slices in the kettle, until the pieces fell apart.

But the happiest of all was Mattspelle. He stood behind the others, with a look of great content on his face. Not a word did he utter, for Mattspelle seldom opened his mouth except to eat, and he did not crowd to the front, for he was no forward fellow. But when the house-mother asked him if he wanted more bread, his round face shone still brighter, and when Marie the housemaid took his bread and dipped it for him, he even smiled.

The mistress was thankful when the lunch was over. She expected her sister and her brother-in-law, the postmaster, and their two children to supper, and there was yet much to be done. The cakes were not ready; the little ones must be brushed and have fresh collars; the presents must be sealed up; the Christmas table must be arranged. There were a thousand things to do.

Just as she was busiest in the kitchen, she remembered that there were some things to be brought from the store. She went in to her husband to ask if he could spare one of his men.

"Certainly!"

Mattspelle was sent for, and soon the sleigh was brought to the door. The mistress came out with a long list of articles needed, and baskets, jugs, and bags were put into the sleigh. And, first and last, Mattspelle was cautioned to be careful, and look to everything.

Oh yes, he would be very careful. That was all right. And he grasped the reins, ready to start; but at this moment out rushed eight-year-old Kerstin.

"Mamma, I want to go too!"

She was a regular tomboy. She liked to be in the stable and cow-yard with the cattle, and enjoyed nothing more than to ride on the hay-cart, the wood-cart, and in the sleigh, if nothing more tempting offered. She had nearly missed Mattspelle, for she and her brother were quarrelling over a present which was sealed up, and which she was determined to secure for herself. But just then she heard Svarten neigh, and it was to her like a battle-cry.

"Can't you stay at home on Christmas Eve?" said her mother, trying to push her back into the house. "It will be dark before he gets back, and it is so cold!"

Kerstin stamped her foot and shrieked:

"I will! I will! Papa says that we must be out every day, and I have stayed in all the morning"; and, peeping from under her mother's arm, she cried to Mattspelle: "Wait a bit, I'm coming."

She darted like an arrow into the house, and before the slow Mattspelle could obey his mistress's orders and drive on, the child was back, with her cloak flying open, and her fur cap perched on her head. She jumped up beside Mattspelle, jerked the reins from his hands, and chirruped "Svarten."

The mother called after her and was obliged to coax and beg her to wait a little till someone could bring wraps, so that she might not catch cold and fall ill.

Mrs. Stenstrom was really vexed, and scolded, while she carefully wrapped up Kerstin's little feet, hands, and body. She was "a naughty, wilful child, who always wanted her own way," and if it were not Christmas Eve, she would "tell papa, and put an end to the matter."

"Oh, papa would let me go," cried Kerstin, getting on the last mitten, and taking a fresh grasp of the reins.

She sat beside Mattspelle, her little nose in the air, her blue eyes scarcely showing under the fur. She nodded and smiled to her mother, the little white teeth gleaming, and mamma must nod and smile back, although she really was vexed with the spoiled child.

The sleigh flew off, and Mrs. Stenstrom went in. When the father was told of Kerstin's escapade, he only laughed. She was the most mischievous of the children, and it was just as

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well she was out of the way when they were all so busy, he said.

Time passed. Everyone was busy, sealing up presents and writing rhymes. Papa was called in to dress the tree, or else it would never be finished. Twilight came. The lights were lit and the supper-table spread. At five o'clock, it was pitch-dark. The guests were expected at any moment, and the hostess had gone to dress.

But where were Kerstin and Mattspelle? The mother had once or twice wondered that they had not yet returned, and the father had grumbled over the delay. Still, there was no cause for alarm, for one was always obliged to wait in the stores on such a night.

Pretty soon Emma the cook, crossing the yard, heard sleigh-bells and saw Svarten and the sleigh, with Mattspelle on the seat. Kerstin was not there; but then, she was such a wild youngster, always jumping out of the carriage without being helped! Probably she was out, shutting the gate.

Emma called to Mattspelle:

"Hello, Mattspelle! It looks as if you had brought back a smarter load than you took with you."

Mattspelle hardly saw her, although she carried a lantern. He drove on a little, and stopped before he had reached the kitchen door, got down, and began attending the horse.

Emma had a presentiment of some disaster, and went forward, throwing the light on his face. He looked strange, and turned away his eyes.

"Has anything happened?"

Mattspelle said nothing.

"Answer man. What have you done with her?"

Emma took hold of him and turned him round. He stood there before her, and dropped the whip in the snow.

"I—I—could not help it."

His voice sounded as if the tears were not far away, and he looked at Emma pleadingly, as if he hoped she might help him.

Meanwhile there was a stir within. The bells had been heard, and maids and children peered from the windows and doors, and hastened out when they saw that something unusual had happened.

Emma brushed past them, pointed at Mattspelle, and gasped out something unintelligible. Almost breathless, she hurried into the drawing-room, where the master was lighting the candles in the sconces.

As he looked at her, he trembled. He thought the house was on fire.

"What is it?"

"Mattspelle has come back, and without Kerstin."

The master rushed out, pale with fright. The hall was full of people, and they had got Mattspelle within the door. He stood in the midst of them, cap in hand, pale and frightened so that, in spite of the grease and cold water, his hair stood out in all directions. His eyes were fixed on the floor. Thus far no one had succeeded in getting a word out of him.

"What does this mean?" cried Mr. Stenstrom. "What have you done with her?"

"I couldn't help it," answered the man, but without lifting his eyes. "It wasn't my fault—she fell down—the hill."

"Did she fall off? But she isn't lying there now?"

He took the man by the shoulder and shook him.

"Answer, fellow!"

"Ye-e-s," said Mattspelle.

"And you did not lift her up?"

No answer.

"You went on again?"

Mattspelle glanced up a moment, then looked at his feet again.

"It was all over," he said.

"You don't know what you are saying, fool!" shrieked the unhappy father, and shook him again. Suddenly he released him, and cried out:

"Bring lanterns."

All was excitement. The mother, almost overcome by the news, rushed out into the snow after her husband, while one of the maids hastened after her with wraps. The house was deserted.

Mattspelle slowly lifted his eyes and gazed at the excited people. An expression of surprise was depicted on his large, heavy features. He pulled his hair, but not a word came from him.

"Where did it happen?" asked one of the party hurrying back. In the confusion no one had thought of this.

"It was close by the second gate," said Mattspelle, and pointed in that direction.

His questioner took him by the arm, and pushed him down the steps.

"I'll teach you to stand there and point! Aren't you able to go with us and show us the place?"

Mr. Stenstrom had got into the sleigh with his wife and driven off. The others hurried after.

The husband tried to calm his wife. Probably the child had struck on a stone and had fainted, and that idiot had lost his wits and driven off without her. Nothing more alarming could have happened.

Soon sleigh-bells were heard. They came nearer.

"It is the postmaster's sleigh," said someone.

It was indeed the postmaster, who sat on the box with the coachman, and in the sleigh were his wife and the children, almost hidden in furs. The sleigh stopped.

"What has happened?" was asked.

Mr. Stenstrom began to explain, and just then a little hand was thrust out of the mass of furs, waving a cap.

"Hello, papa, here I am."

It was Kerstin's voice. The father and mother could not believe their eyes. Yes, their darling stood before them. The mother must feel her with her trembling hands.

"How are you, darling? Did you hurt yourself? How did it happen? Where did you find her?"

"Find her!" No one understood, and Kerstin opened wide her large eyes. What was the matter with them? She was all right.

While Mattspelle waited in the shop for his purchases, she had gone into the postmaster's, and there it was decided that she should return with them, instead of with the man. That was all.

"But didn't you tell him when you went in?"

Of course she did; and he had been invited into the kitchen and treated to cake and wine.

"Where is that blockhead?" burst out the father, and turned so abruptly that he very nearly knocked over Mattspelle, who stood there as if wishing to attract his master's attention.

"Ah, there you are, you numskull! What's this yarn you have been telling us? Didn't you know that Kerstin was coming back with the postmaster?"

Mattspelle stared. "Ye-e-s," he finally said.

"Well, then, how could you lose her on the way?"

No answer. Mattspelle scratched his tow head and looked away.

"Perhaps it was something else you lost?"

"Ye-e-s."

"What was it then?"

This was beyond Mattspelle's comprehension. Didn't his master know for what they had been searching so late in the evening?

"Don't you hear me, boy?"

"It lies down there in the ditch," and in the snow a thick something was slowly trickling.

"What is it?" asked his mistress.

Mattspelle twisted his cap. Were they blind, too?

"Why, it's the syrup jug."

"The syrup jug!"

It was Mrs. Stenstrom's large jug which lay there, and for which they had searched with such sorrow and anxiety. For a moment no one spoke. Then all began to shout and laugh, so that they could scarcely stand, and the Christmas joy which appeared to have gone for ever, began anew out in the snow.

The only one who stood silent and astonished was Mattspelle. It seemed to him that people were very queer. To be sure, he had wondered a little at the fuss made over the jug, but then to have such mirth when they found it smashed into bits—that was, indeed, strange.

"Was that anything to laugh at?" thought Mattspelle.

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A CHRISTMAS CARD

IT is both painful and perplexing to be answered by a heavy sigh when one expects an exclamation of pleasure and admiration; so it was not wonderful that Mrs. Austin, under these exact conditions, looked anxiously into her husband's face.

She was holding up for his inspection a large wax doll, one of the treasures for Madge, the blue-eyed darling of four years, who was counting the days until Santa Claus should come. Every stitch of Miss Dollie's elaborate costume was the work of Mrs. Austin's busy fingers in hours when Madge was dreaming of full stockings and Christmas trees, and the last stitch set, the result was displayed for "papa's" approval.

Now papa was quite as devoted a parent to Madge and two-year-old Harold as mamma, and took deep interest in all nursery matters. It may be that the memory of two other curly heads and baby faces that had brightened the nursery for a few brief months and then been hidden beneath the grave deepened the love for the children who came later to comfort their aching hearts.

But it is certain that the little Austins were as much loved and petted as children could be, and did not dream more hopefully of Christmas treasures than their parents did lovingly of supplying them.

So it was with some alarm that Mrs. Austin put aside her last triumph in needle-work and threw her arms around her husband.

"What is it, Charlie?" she asked.

He drew her into a loving embrace before he answered sadly:

"I met my father again to-day. Margaret, it will kill me to have things go on as they are. He was wretchedly shabby, feeble, and broken, looking so old and so ill that I could not keep the tears out of my eyes. But he would not speak to me. I said all I could say in the street, but he stopped short and said, 'I do not know you, sir! You will cease to annoy me!' I could not make a scene in the street."

There was a choking sound in Charles Austin's voice as he ceased speaking, but, being a man, he kept back the sob that would have followed.

"At Christmas time, too," she said. "It is useless to send presents, Charlie; he has sent them back every year."

He drew her into a loving embrace.

. . . . . .

The story was an old one, a true-love marriage made in the face of disinheritance and paternal displeasure. Mrs. Austin had been a poor girl, employed in the factory of Simon Austin, then a man of great wealth and good social position; a man purse-proud, arrogant, and full of his own importance.

When his only child, his idolised, indulged son and heir, told him of his love for pretty Margaret Hay, a factory girl, living in the factory boarding-house and wearing calico dresses, the old man was a maniac in his fury.

He would not see that the girl was pleasing in manner, refined in taste, well educated, and sweet tempered, one to brighten any home, and make any good man thoroughly happy. He gave a fierce command that the matter should end there and then.

Charles Austin, utterly unaccustomed to be crossed in any fancy, refused an obedience never before exacted, and the conversation ended in a stormy quarrel and the young man's expulsion from home.

But, with good fortune that does not often follow disobedient sons, Charles was at once taken into the employ and favour of his mother's brother, an eccentric old bachelor, who gave the young couple a home in his own luxurious house.

It was a new life to the old gentleman, and he took the keenest interest in all the household affairs as Margaret managed them, loved and mourned the older children, and, dying when Madge was but a year old, left his entire large estate to his "beloved nephew, Charles Austin."

And while the sunshine of prosperity had no clouds for this wayward son, the father's fortunes had gone all awry. Some commercial panic was the first blow to Simon Austin, and an effort to repair the loss by speculation only added to disaster.

He missed the cool, clear head of the son who had of late years been his active partner, the judgment he had first trained and then trusted to guide his large business. He was angry, and his angry impulses led him into dire blunders, until he grew so involved that there was no escape, and he failed for more than his entire fortune.

At once Charles hastened to him, offering his entire wealth to save him, only to be met with a proud, fierce refusal to be under any obligation to a disobedient child or his beggar wife.

Over and over again, as poverty became more and more bitter to the man broken and aged, did his son implore him to allow him to help him, offer him a home, love, care, obedience even, only to be thrown back with angry scorn.

A proud man always, Simon Austin cherished his wrath as the last remnant of the old arrogance, and would not bend one inch. He received anonymous letters, telling him that sums of money were in the bank in his name, and wrote back refusing to claim them.

He mistrusted every offer of service, and returned to Charles every scrap of aid sent to him, often perplexing his son by sending what had not come from him, though he always refused to believe him.

And being old and broken in health, he sank lower and lower, unable to fill lucrative positions, and taking the work that gave him barely food and the poorest clothing.

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Very sadly the son and his wife talked of the impossibility of helping one who would not let any appeal touch him, until suddenly Margaret cried:

"Charles, I have an idea. Let me try to win your father over. I will send him a Christmas card."

"My dear, he would not open the envelope."

"Let me try; and see if your father does not dine with us to-morrow."

"Dine with us! Margaret, you must be crazy!"

"Not a bit of it. Just let me have my own way, dear."

"Do you ever fail to get that?" was the laughing query, for something in his wife's face gave fresh hope to Charles Austin's heart.

. . . . . .

It was a very mean room in a very poor house where the sun of a bright Christmas morning awakened Simon Austin. Everything in the shabby place told of the lack of woman's care and love.

Dust hung upon everything. There were no dainty trifles of needlework; the curtains were dingy and crooked, the carpet torn and dirty.

Very wearily and slowly the old man dressed himself, lit a fire in the grate, and rang for the poor breakfast his landlady provided. Dinner and tea he was supposed to buy outside; but very often this muddy coffee, stale bread, and tough chop or steak constituted the sole repast of the twenty-four hours.

It was Christmas Day, and no business took the old man out, so, after the untempting tray was removed, he took a newspaper and drew shiveringly to the fire.

But before he had read one column there came a knock at the door, and it opened wide and closed again behind a child—a little girl, in a quaint Mother Hubbard cloak and hat, with large blue eyes and clustering golden curls, and holding a large flat basket of fresh, beautiful flowers.

While the old man gazed at her in silent amazement, she said, in a sweet, childish voice:

"If you please, dear grandpapa, I am your Christmas card!"

"You—you are what?" he said, utterly bewildered.

"If you please, dear grandpapa, I am your Christmas card!"

"Who sent you here? What is your name?"

"Mamma brought me here. I am Madge Austin, dear grandpapa——" and, then, half-frightened at the strange face and the poor room, the child's eyes filled and her lips trembled.

"I want to go home!" she whispered.

"Don't cry," Mr. Austin said, taking her in his arms very tenderly. "Don't cry, dear; I will take you home."

"Oh, if you please, because my big doll is there, and all the toys Santa Claus brought, and brother Harry." Then with a look of inquiry, "What did Santa Claus bring you?"

"Nothing."

"Oh!" with a very deep-drawn sigh; "was it because you are up so many stairs? But he always comes to our house, and mamma said perhaps to-day he would bring us our grandpapa! We haven't got any now, you know, and mamma said that if he did come we would love him just the same as papa, and he would love us. And please, grandpapa, so we will."

And the child put her little arms round the head bent down before her, and lifted the face quivering and tear stained.

"Oh, don't cry! Oh, please don't cry; only naughty girls and boys cry. Oh," and again terror found voice in the plea, "I want to go home."

"Yes, yes, I will take you home. Bring your flowers, child. This is no place for flowers or—or Christmas cards."

Down the creaking stairs the old man led the child, tenderly, watching that the little feet did not slip or stumble. Through the sunny streets, unheeding the cold, she walked beside him, prattling of her home, and of the dear grandpapa that she had been taught to love.

That was the crowning amazement. No child in a few short hours could have been taught to talk of the estranged parent as this child talked.

She told the old man of the prayer she said night and morning, "Please, dear Lord, send my grandfather home!" of her talks with her mother about the unknown relative, whom she was to reverence and love, should he ever come home, opening to the hardened, but, oh, such a lonely heart, a hope of rest and affection, that he felt it would be bitter as death to thrust aside now.

Through the sunny streets . . . she walked beside him.

There was no need to ring the bell of the stately mansion to which Simon Austin led his grandchild. Eager eyes were watching for the coming of the pair. Eager hands were waiting to open the door. Tender arms and strong hands led Simon Austin into the parlour; Margaret's kisses fell warm upon his wrinkled cheeks; Charlie's hands removed the shabby overcoat; baby Harold clung to his knees, shouting:

"Dandpa's tum! Santa Claus bringed dandpa!"

No pride could stand against this loving, sincere welcome. So pride collapsed.

"You really want me, Charlie?" the old man faltered. "It is not mere charity?"

"Hush!" whispered Margaret. "Do not grieve him by such a word. He will never be happy till you come home, dear father."

And so Christmas once again gathered up the tangled threads of estrangement, and knit them into strong bands of home love.

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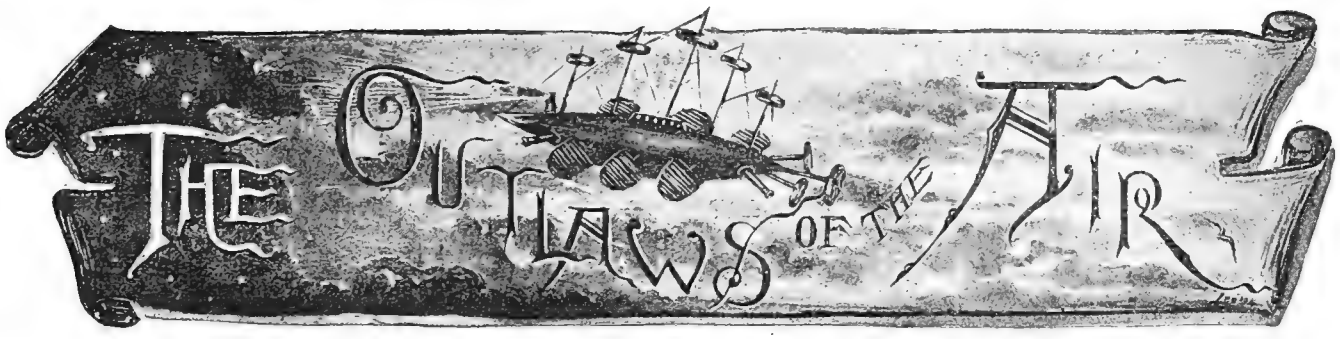

By George Griffith,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," &c.

SUMMARY.

Max Renault—leading spirit of Anarchist Autonomie Group No. 7, who has joined the Utopians (a Socialistic colony on an island in the South Pacific) in order to steal the air-ship they are building, which he succeeds in doing.

Franz Hartog—a German engineer, in league with Renault, who steals a very fast torpedo-boat destroyer from the Russian Government to levy blackmail on the Atlantic.

Sir Harry Milton—a wealthy young English nobleman, who by chance comes across the island of Utopia, in his yacht, the *Calypso*, and subsequently devotes the whole of his fortune to hunting down Renault and Hartog.

Herbert Wyndham—a lieutenant in the British Navy who is travelling with Sir Harry for the benefit of his health, and who determines to resign his commission and couple his energies with those of Sir Harry in destroying the Anarchists, on account of the fact that he has been stabbed by Renault when the latter attempts to carry off Violet in the air-ship.

Frederick Austen—the inventor of the air-ship, who shares its secret with Edward Adams, Dr. Edwards, and Ambrose Millar, three other Utopians.

Frank Markham—the young captain of the Utopian yacht, *Mermaid*.

Violet Milton—Sir Harry's sister, and Lieutenant Wyndham's sweetheart, is fearfully injured by throwing herself out of the air-ship on which Renault has tried to carry her off.

Lea Cassilis (alias Mme. Dail)—a member of Autonomie Group No. 7 with whom Renault is in love.

Dora Merton—a fair Utopian, who has made an impression on Sir Harry.

Lucy Summers—another fair Utopian.

Renault, after levying blackmail with Hartog on the high seas, returns to Utopia with the object of destroying the colony, but finds it deserted. After a time he goes to Europe in the air-ship *Vengeur*, and, together with Lea Cassilis, visits the Criterion Theatre in London, where he is recognised by Sir Harry and Lieutenant Wyndham, who effect his capture. He is tried, and condemned to death.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Calm Before a Storm.

According to the merciful practice of the English criminal law, three Sundays are allowed to elapse between the passing of sentence of death and its execution, the execution as a rule taking place on the Tuesday following the third Sunday. Sentence had been passed on Max Renault on Monday, the 5th of April, and, therefore, as the newspapers speedily informed the general public and the thousands of Anarchists, scattered all over the Continent and America, who had gloated over his exploits with fiendish delight, and had already given him the first place in their evil hierarchy, the execution was fixed for Tuesday, the 27th.

This gave an interval of about five weeks from his arrest which, added to the two months which had passed since the arrival of the *Nautilus* in British waters, made a period of over three months during which every effort had been strained both by the Anarchists and the Utopians to push on the construction of their respective aerial fleets, which another month or so would now probably see equipped and afloat.

Sir Harry and his friends naturally had one great advantage in being able to have their ships laid down, built, and equipped out of hand without any fear of interference by the authorities, while the Anarchists were forced to have the sections of theirs made by various and widely-separated firms, and then had to take them away to be put together on the floating dockyard into which they had transformed the *Bremen*. On the other hand, this advantage was, if anything, more than neutralised by the fact that their enemies were already in possession of the only air-ship capable of taking the offensive at any moment, and that too in a style that would far eclipse her former depredations.

The immediate consequence of Max's visit to America and Europe had been the completion, under the specified time, of the armament which Hartog had designed for the *Vengeur*, and, while the whole world was wondering what had become of her, she was lying snugly hidden on an uninhabited islet in the Faroe group, taking on board her guns and ammunition from the *Pilgrim*. When she took the air again she carried four pneumatic shell-guns capable of throwing projectiles charged with five pounds weight of either anarchite, or fire-mixture, to a distance varying from two to five miles according to her elevation.

These were mounted two ahead and two astern, and on each broadside she carried two automatic guns of the Maxim pattern, but of very light construction and small calibre, from each of which could be projected, every minute they were in action, seven hundred conical nickle-coated bullets, which would kill at a range of from four to five thousand yards. In addition to these she carried five hundred specially prepared projectiles made of papier-mâché, and charged with fire-mixture for use in her vertical bomb-tubes.

As her net lifting power was nearly two tons over and above the weight of the hull, machinery, and guns, she was able to carry a quantity of ammunition sufficient to do an enormous amount of damage, considering the very advantageous conditions under which it would be discharged—conditions which would allow every projectile to be sent home to its mark with the most deliberate aim.

As soon as the *Pilgrim* had performed this part of her work, she set out for Liverpool, where the Anarchist agents had instructions to send the parts of the air-ships and their equipments as they were completed, and there, under the noses of the authorities, the harmless-looking cases were shipped as hardware and machinery for the port of Monte Video, and carried away as soon as a cargo was completed to the island of Trinidad, off the coast of Brazil, where she was met by the *Bremen* and the *Destroyer*.

Meanwhile, a series of conferences were being held between Sir Harry and his Utopian friends, and the Syndicate which had built the *Britannia* and now had six other aeroplanes under construction. Of this syndicate the ruling and moving spirit was Mr. Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the aeroplane and the automatic gun which, in its deadly fashion, had sung the praises of his inventive skill in so many parts of the world.

The issue of the conflict between the *Vengeur* and the *Britannia* had conclusively proved that the flying machine was no match for the air-ship proper. In fact, years before, Mr. Maxim had said that if ever an air-ship could be made that could raise itself vertically from the ground and keep itself suspended motionless in the air at any desired elevation within reason, it would be an immeasurably superior engine of warfare to his own aëroplane.

Now that there could no longer be any doubt that such an

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air-ship had been built, Mr. Maxim, with the impersonal unselfishness of the true scientist, promptly admitted the fact, and set himself to work to design an air-ship that would beat the *Vengeur*. This was the common ground upon which he and Sir Harry and his friends met, and the result was that they put their resources and their knowledge together and formed a corporation under the title of the Aerial Navigation Syndicate, the first act of which was to return the unspent balance of the Government grant to the Exchequer, so as to be rid of the official inspection and interference which had seriously hampered the movements of the old Syndicate, and set to work on an independent basis.

Adams and Mr. Austen still retained in their own exclusive keeping the secret of the composition of the motor-fuel to be used in the engines, and the last of the Articles of Association was to the effect that no attempt was to be made to trespass upon this forbidden ground. The Syndicate possessed a capital of three millions, and, as the event proved, no capital ever before subscribed for any object made such enormous profits as this did, though how they were to be made, remained a matter of pure conjecture until the world rubbed its eyes and wondered why it had never thought of such a scheme before.

The advantage of their alliance with Mr. Maxim very soon became apparent to Sir Harry and his friends. His unrivalled inventive skill, and the immense experience he had gained in the long course of experiments that he had made in connection with the construction of his aeroplane, at once bore fruit in improved designs for the new air-ships. Not only were they to be made larger and more powerful, but several improvements were to be made both in their internal construction and the materials used, which were expected to greatly increase their strength and carrying power, and would so enable them to carry a more powerful armament and a greater quantity of ammunition.

A fleet of twenty-four of these air-ships had been laid down in ten different manufactories scattered over the British Isles, and all the firms engaged in the work had been obliged to give a pledge, under heavy penalties, not to disclose any particulars connected with the work, or to allow the workmen engaged on one part to know what was being done in another department. Added to this, the firms that were building the hulls knew nothing about the machinery; and even the various parts of the engines, the propellers, and the lifting fans were made by different engineering firms under orders given in different names.

Mr. Hiram S. Maxim.

As a matter of fact, two or three of these firms were actually employed at the same time in making portions either of the air-ships or their machinery for both the Anarchists and the Syndicate; but, as the most elaborate precautions were taken on both sides to keep all reliable information out of the newspapers, and as the prices paid by both were so high, the various manufacturers found the keeping of the secrets far too profitable to run any risks of the momentous work on which they were engaged becoming known to anyone save themselves and their employers.

The object of this policy of secrecy was, in the first place, to obviate as far as possible the danger of discovery by Anarchist spies, which would in all probability lead to the destruction by the *Vengeur* of any dockyard or manufactory that was found to be making any part of the Syndicate's ships. Added to this, the Syndicate had ulterior motives in view, which carried its plans far beyond the extermination of the Anarchists as a fighting force.

The British Government had refused to avail itself of Mr. Austen's offer to place the designs of the *Nautilus* at its disposal unless the secret of the motor fuel were also given up to them. This was, of course, impossible, and so the *Nautilus* and her sister ship, the *Aries*, which was being constructed as rapidly as possible at Elswick, were to remain, for the time being at any rate, the only examples of that type of warship in existence.

An immense amount of popular indignation was naturally aroused by the publication of the news that the Government had virtually retired from the building of any aerial craft which could hope to engage the *Vengeur* on equal terms. Questions were asked in Parliament and answered in the usual terms of official reticence and ambiguity. The Syndicate kept its own council rigidly, and the interviewers who besieged its members were sent empty away one after the other until they gradually got tired and relieved their disappointment by spreading reports that the Syndicate had nothing to tell because it had nothing to do.

It was reported on wholly erroneous grounds, or rather upon no grounds at all, that all efforts to transform the aeroplanes into air-ships such as the *Vengeur* were believed to have ended in failure, and this sent public opinion round the other way, until it praised the Government and the War Office for refusing to spend the money that was so urgently needed for strengthening the Army and the Fleet upon experiments in an entirely new fighting arm which, for all anyone knew for certain, might never be brought to perfection. The members of the Syndicate, far from denying these reports, rather encouraged them, as their work depended in no way upon popular favour or support, and anything that tended to increase the mystery in which they were shrouding their plans was so much added defence against the very probable attacks of their enemies in the Anarchist camp.

As for the *Vengeur* and the *Destroyer*, as day after day and week after week went by, and nothing was heard of either of them, it began to be believed either that some unknown misfortune had overwhelmed them, or that the capture and now certain fate of their leader had so disorganised them that, like a body without a head, they had become incapable, for the time being, of definite action.

Even the Utopians were themselves deceived by the quietude of affairs since the arrest of Renault. They felt certain that he was not the man to disclose the secret of the motor-fuel to any of his followers, for to do so would be to surrender the one claim he had to supremacy among a band of men whose especial boast it was that they owned no law, but that of their own individual wills. From this they argued to the conclusion that the *Vengeur* had exhausted her supply of fuel and that, while the only man who could and would replenish it was lying waiting for death in Newgate, the air-ship, as useless as a steamer without coal, was hidden in some out-of-the-way place, impotent for any further mischief.

But while the public was diverting its attention from the doings of the Anarchists to the war with Russia, which the rapid breaking up of the ice in the Baltic would in a few days bring from the East to the West, and while the members of the Syndicate were permitting themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security, the enemy had been hard at work with equal secrecy and equal energy. Lea Cassilis, from her house in Paris, had been in constant communication with the Anarchist groups, both in England and all over the Continent, perfecting the preparations for the simultaneous striking of a

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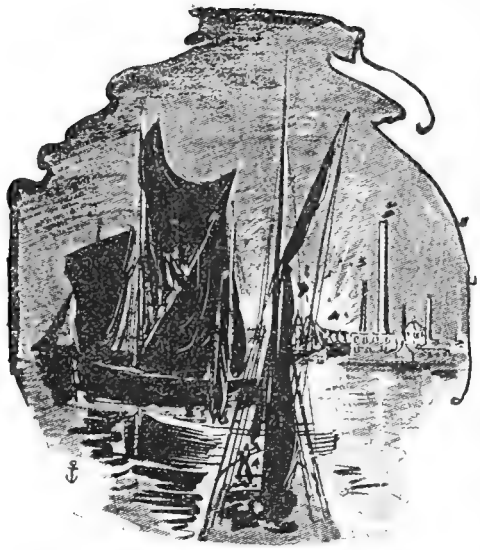


One happened in London on the banks of the Thames.

number of blows at the social organisation on the day fixed for Renault's execution.

Spies had also been ceaselessly at work, ferreting out as far as was possible the designs of Sir Harry and his friends with regard to the building of the new aerial fleet, for Lea had learnt from Max that Mr. Austen at least, and probably Adams as well, knew the all-important secret of the motive power, and would, therefore, be certain to build other air-ships to replace the stolen one.

Their comings and goings were watched, and their footsteps dogged day and night by Anarchist spies, and, in spite of all the precautions that they took, their lives were in danger, and might have been taken a dozen times over, had not Lea, still firmly convinced that some means would be found to rescue Max, and, believing that his vengeance would only be satisfied by killing them himself, had expressly forbidden their death, at any rate until it was known whether or not Max would be able to take his vengeance for himself.

So successful, however, were her spies in their efforts to find out what the Syndicate was really doing that, on the night of the Sunday before the Tuesday fixed for Max's execution, four explosions occurred almost simultaneously in four of the works where parts of their air-ships were being constructed. One happened in London on the banks of the Thames, another at Sheffield, another at Birmingham, and another on the Clyde.

How they were carried out was, of course, a mystery, and remained one; but so well were they planned and executed that essential parts of no fewer than eight of the twenty-four air-ships were utterly ruined, and the building of the complete fleet was thus delayed for quite three months longer. The next morning, the "Anarchist Terror," as the newspapers had come to call it, was more widespread than ever. The explosions were taken as a direct renewal of the warning that had been given by Max himself and in the red poster.

Popular excitement rose to fever heat in a few hours; the news from the seat of war was once more at a discount, and the Anarchists and their threats and possible doings once more occupied the first places in the columns of the newspapers and the excited imagination of the public. It was confidently reported, and almost universally believed, that the *Vengeur* had passed from town to town during the night and bombarded the works, which had been destroyed from the clouds; and then the man in the street began to ask his neighbour, with anxiety by no means unmingled with fear, what would happen to London itself if, after all, the Anarchists were able to carry out their threats against it?

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT THE LAST MOMENT.

As soon as day dawned over London, on Monday, the 26th of April, the policemen and that portion of the inhabitants who happened, whether by reason of business or pleasure, to be abroad, were astonished and not a little disquieted to find hundreds of red placards posted in all the conspicuous parts of the city and its surroundings, bearing the simply ominous inscription:—

BEWARE!

AND TAKE WARNING WHILE THERE IS YET TIME.

WE WILL HAVE

LIFE FOR LIFE AND BLOOD FOR BLOOD!

—The Anarchist Executive.

But not only was the placard posted on the walls of public and other conspicuous buildings. In the form of a leaflet it was scattered in thousands about the streets and even on the house-tops. In vain did the police attempt to collect these after they had torn the placards down. They were picked up by the early-comers into the streets and passed eagerly from hand to hand; then the evening papers, published soon after seven in the morning, got hold of them and reproduced them in their boldest and blackest type, so that by mid-day the scare was complete.

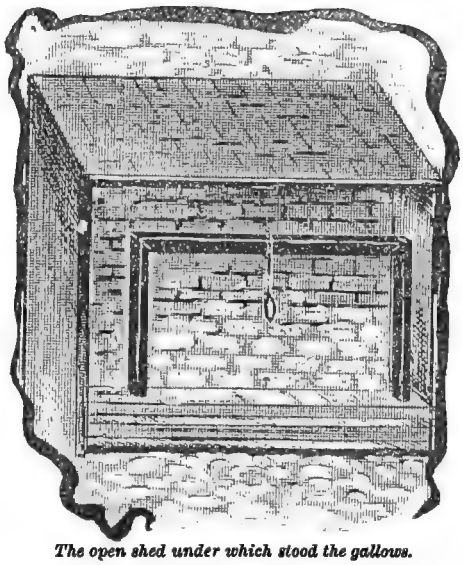
Then came the irrepressible monger of sensation, and he, having no facts to go upon, promptly elaborated from his inner consciousness letters from non-existent correspondents, describing how, in the watches of the night, they had seen—at any rate with the eye of imagination—a vague and ghostly form corresponding to the published descriptions of the air-ship, floating to and fro over London, and scattering a red rain of leaflets far and wide over the streets and house-tops.

That day, important news which had come to hand, telling of the break-up of the ice in the Baltic and the mobilisation of the Russian fleet, was crowded into obscure corners to make room for romantic descriptions of aerial exploits on the part of the *Vengeur*, which no human eye had ever seen her perform, and with equally imaginary narrations dealing with the manner in which the real inspirer of all this panic, and the veritable hero of the moment, was passing the last few hours that were left to him on earth.

What he ate and drank, the books he read, the number of hours he had slept each night, and the very words with which he was supposed to have refused the ministrations of the chaplain; his behaviour towards the warders, and even his demeanour when alone, were all set forth with a well-simulated accuracy which spoke volumes for the imaginative capacity of those who had corrected the dearth of reliable facts out of the plenitude of their own inventiveness.

To all this was added a touch of realism which, in the eyes of the multitude at any rate, endowed it with unimpeachable veracity. Line-sketches were given of the condemned cell, showing the arch-Anarchist seated at the wooden table with his face buried in his manacled hands, while two stern-faced warders kept watch and ward on either side of him.

Later editions followed this up with plans of Dead Man's Passage, the yard of Newgate, and the open shed under which stood the gallows ready to receive their victim. Then, when the sensation worked up by the newspapers had reached its height, rumours began to fly about from lip to lip to the effect that the air-ship, which was now a fearful reality in the popular mind, had been seen here and there and everywhere,



The open shed under which stood the gallows.

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swooping down through the clouds and hovering over affrighted towns and villages, flying at full speed through the air on some unknown errand of slaughter and destruction, and even hovering over Osborne House with intent to bury the Queen and her household in its ruins.

Everybody appeared to feel confident that some extraordinary attempt at rescue would be made, and the wildest theories were advanced in anticipation of it. It was even suggested that for once the French method should be adopted, that the hour of execution should be altered, and that Renault should be taken unexpectedly from his cell and hanged out of hand without warning.

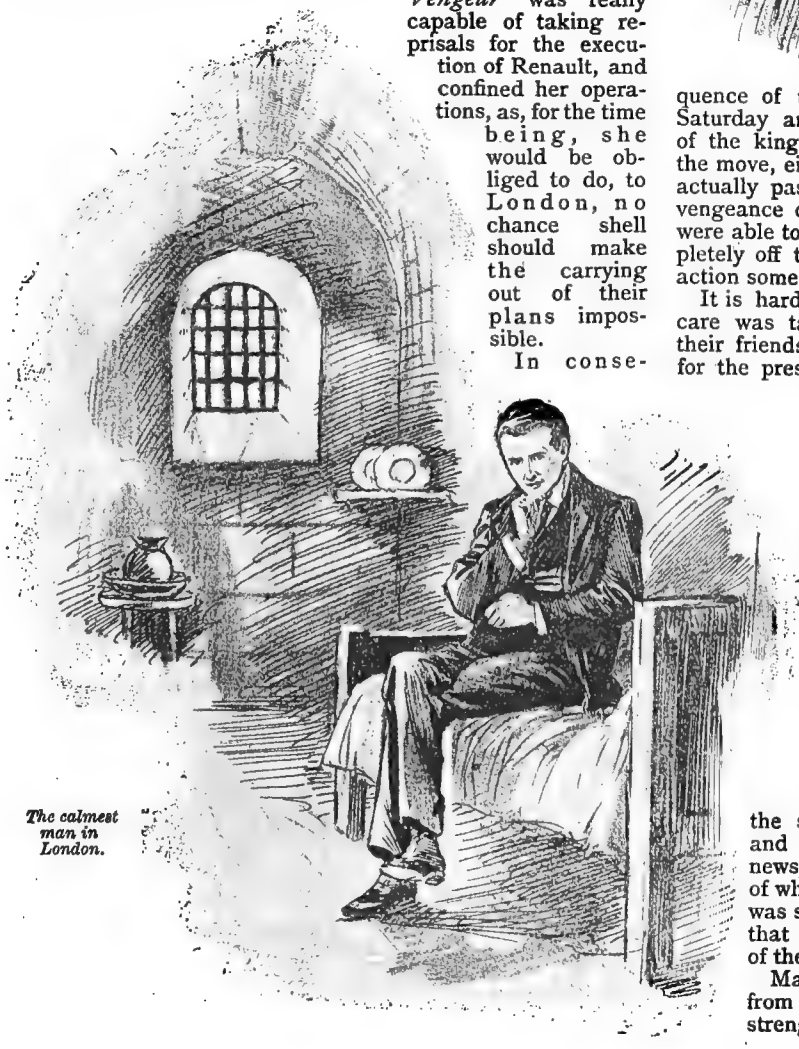
The Home Secretary was actually asked a question in Parliament as to whether, in view of the exceptional circumstances, he did not think it advisable that something of this sort should be done; but the questioner was met with a cold rebuff and informed that the Government declined to be intimidated by the vague threats that were being circulated, and that the law would take its course in the ordinary way, and at the appointed time—namely, eight o'clock on the following morning—an intimation with which the Anarchists were promptly made acquainted through the medium of the evening papers.

Meanwhile, Sir Harry, Mr. Austen, Adams, and Lieutenant Wyndham, and his two naval friends had come to the conclusion that, for the sake of the momentous projects which they, as active members of the Aerial Navigation Syndicate, had in view, it would be better for them to scatter as widely over the British Islands as they could, so that, in case the *Vengeur* was really capable of taking reprisals for the execution of Renault, and confined her operations, as, for the time being, she would be obliged to do, to London, no chance shell should make the carrying out of their plans impossible.

He submitted to the process of pinioning.

In consequence of this decision, they had all left London on the Saturday and Sunday by different trains for various parts of the kingdom with the intention of keeping constantly on the move, either on land or sea, until the hour of execution had actually passed, and it was known what form, if any, the vengeance of the Anarchists was to take. In this way, they were able to put the Anarchist spies, for the time being, completely off their track, and, it is probable, to this course of action some of them, at any rate, owed their lives.

It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to mention that very good care was taken to send Dora Merton, her mother, and all their friends into places where they would be safe, at least for the present, from the attacks of their enemies. Some had gone to remote villages in Wales and Scotland, some were scattered among English watering-places, and some had been sent to the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands; and, as all had, of course, renounced the picturesque Utopian costume on their arrival in England, they found no difficulty in losing themselves among the inhabitants of the places in which they took refuge.



The calmest man in London.

By nightfall on Monday, the whole of London was in a state of feverish and irrepressible anxiety and apprehension. The terror of the unknown hung over everyone, from the mansions of Mayfair to the slums of Whitechapel. No one talked of anything but the approaching doom of the arch-Anarchist and the vengeance that had been threatened by his still invisible allies. An epidemic of unreasoning fear had seized upon the whole people, from those who wandered about the streets arguing and gossiping with each other and buying up every new special edition that the newspaper offices kept pouring out full of repetitions of what had gone before, to the Cabinet Council that was sitting in Downing Street discussing the telegrams that were constantly arriving from the various points of the Empire threatened by Russian attack.

Many believed that London would be bombarded from the air during the night, and this belief was strengthened by a fire which broke out among some

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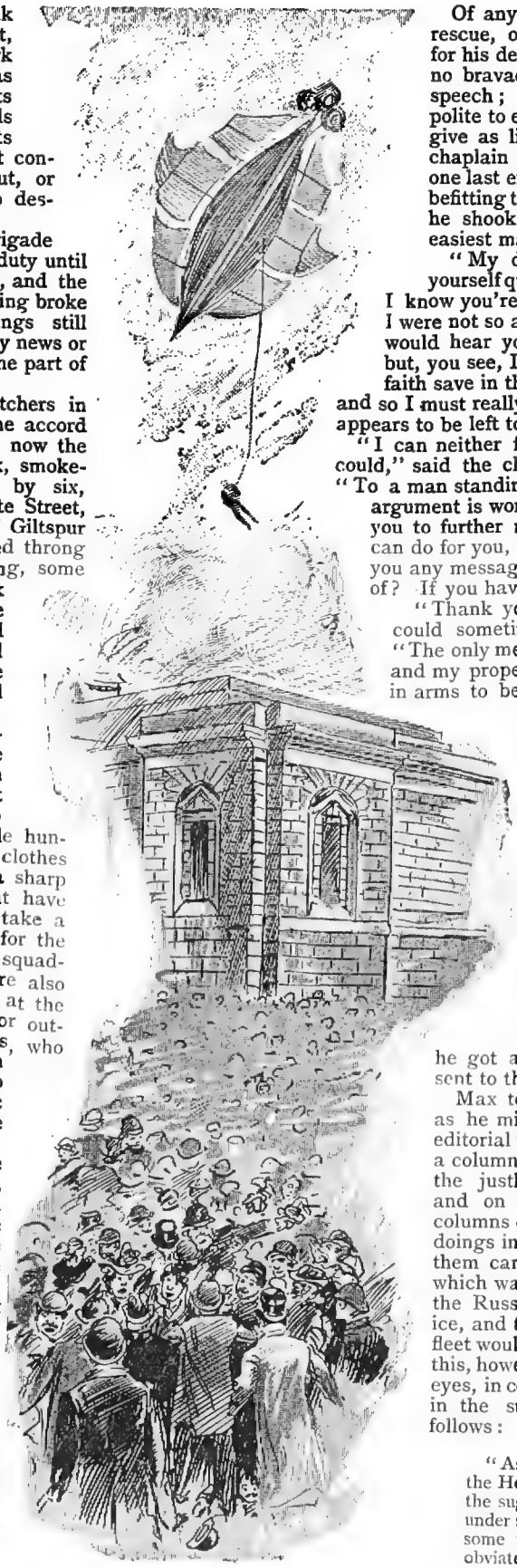
warehouses on the Rotherhithe bank of the river, but which had, in fact, nothing whatever to do with the work of any incendiary. Of course, it was taken for granted that the Anarchists had set them on fire, and thousands of people wandered about the streets all night, wondering where the next conflagration was going to break out, or when the fire bombs would begin to descend from the sky.

The whole strength of the Fire Brigade and of the police force was kept on duty until the morning, but nothing happened, and the grey dawn of a cloudy April morning broke over London, showing its buildings still uninjured, and without bringing any news or warning of aggressive action on the part of the Anarchists.

By five o'clock, the anxious watchers in the street began to move with one accord from all points towards what was now the common centre of interest—the dark, smoke-grimed prison of Newgate; and by six, Ludgate Hill, Old Bailey, Newgate Street, Holborn, and the southern end of Giltspur Street, were packed with an excited throng of anxious, palefaced people waiting, some to see the hauling up of the black flag, and others who could not see it, to hear the shout of relief and the cheer of triumph that would hail its appearance as the sign that the master spirit of the Anarchists had ceased to exist.

All round the prison and its approaches, strong cordons of police were drawn up to keep the crowd in the roadways, and to prevent it getting on to the pavement or too near to the doors of Newgate, while hundreds of other policemen in plain clothes mingled with the crowd, keeping a sharp look out for Anarchists who might have come armed with hand bombs to take a mad and indiscriminate vengeance for the death of their chief. Half-a-dozen squadrons of Lancers and Dragoons were also kept in readiness, but out of sight at the Horse Guards, in case any rioting or outrages on the part of the Anarchists, who were believed to be in strong force in London, should make it necessary to clear the streets, and all the public buildings were guarded by double sentries and extra policemen.

Amidst the general excitment, the man who was the cause of it all was, outwardly at least, the calmest man in London. Certainly, no one in the whole metropolis had slept more soundly than Max Renault had done when the warders woke him at half-past five. He dressed himself leisurely, and with his usual care in his own clothes, which, in accordance with the usual custom, had been returned to him after his sentence. At six, his breakfast was brought to him, and he ate as hearty a meal as though he had been going out hunting, instead of to the gallows, and when it was over he washed it down with half-a-pint of champagne, in which he drank success to Anarchy and destruction to Society.



Of any attempt that might be made for his rescue, or any revenge that might be taken for his death, he said not a word. There was no bravado in his manner or boasting in his speech; he was simply cool and collected, polite to everybody, and apparently anxious to give as little trouble as possible. When the chaplain entered the condemned cell to make one last effort to bring him into a frame of mind befitting the terrible position in which he stood, he shook hands with him, and said, in the easiest manner imaginable:

"My dear sir, I'm afraid you're giving yourself quite unnecessary trouble on my behalf. I know you're doing it from a sense of duty, and if I were not so averse to listening to wasted words, I would hear you with pleasure, if not with profit; but, you see, I have no creed but Anarchy, and no faith save in the ultimate triumph of its principles, and so I must really decline to waste the short time that appears to be left to me in unprofitable conversation."

"I can neither force you to listen, nor would I if I could," said the chaplain gravely and almost sternly. "To a man standing as you do on the brink of eternity, argument is worse than useless, and I will not tempt you to further mockery. Is there anything that I can do for you, I mean in the worldly sense? Have you any message to leave or any property to dispose of? If you have, you may command me."

"Thank you," replied Renault, smiling, as he could sometimes smile, with a rare sweetness, "The only message I have to give has been given. and my property belongs of right to my comrades in arms to be used in the work to which we are devoted. And now, if you wish to do me a real service, get me one of this morning's papers, and let me read quietly until the time comes."

The good chaplain was far too familiar with the behaviour of men in Renault's position not to be able to see that his callousness was genuine, and in no measure assumed. He saw, too, that to make any attempt to perform the last offices of the Church for him would only be to give him opportunity for scoffing which might, if he were provoked too far, degenerate into blasphemy; so he left the cell and went to the governor's room where he got a copy of the *Standard*, which he sent to the condemned cell by a warder.

Max took it and soon became absorbed, as he might well be, in its contents. The editorial page opened with a leading article, a column and a half long, on his career and the justly merited fate that awaited him, and on the next page there were three columns concerning the Anarchists and their doings in all parts of the world, and after them came the war news, the chief item of which was to the effect that Kronstadt and the Russian Baltic ports were now free from ice, and that the mobilisation of the Russian fleet would be complete in a day or two. All this, however, was of no importance, in Max's eyes, in comparison with one brief paragraph in the summary of news which ran as follows:

> "As stated in our late edition last night, the Home Secretary has declined to entertain the suggestion that the convict Renault, now under sentence of death, should be executed at some unknown date and hour, in order to obviate any possible attempt at rescue. Such

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a rescue is rightly considered to be absolutely impossible, and the execution, which is fixed for eight o'clock this morning, will have taken place before these lines are in the hands of the majority of our readers."

Max continued apparently absorbed in the perusal of the paper until a quarter to eight, not even seeming to hear the muffled note of the bell of St. Sepulchre as it tolled his own death-knell. When the governor and the chaplain entered the cell with the executioner, he looked up, laid the paper down, and rose to his feet with a slight bow. The governor briefly informed him the purpose they had come for, and without a word he submitted to the operation of pinioning.

As soon as this was completed the door of the cell was thrown open and the usual procession was formed, the governor leading the way and the chaplain bringing up the rear, reading the burial service of the English Church. So they went from the cell down Dead Man's Passage, and out into the yard. On the threshold, Max paused for just an instant, giving a glance up into the sky, in which the clouds hung low, and then one look at the open shed under which the rope was already dangling from the black-painted beam.

So far he had not opened his lips; but when a fourth of the way between the passage and the scaffold had been traversed, he stopped suddenly, drew a deep breath, and then a long, piercing, screaming cry came from his lips, and rang out high above the murmur of the excited throng outside the prison walls. The next instant, the murmur of the crowd was changed into a roar of amazement, which grew shriller and shriller until it became one mighty, long-drawn yell of fear.

Before the cry Max had raised had died away, a huge grey shape dropped swiftly and vertically from the clouds and passed from the view of the crowd behind the walls of Newgate Yard. Then came the sound of a rapid fusillade of small-arms, and then the air-ship soared up again with the still, pinioned body of Max dangling in a lasso from one of the ports in the hull. Before the *Vengeur* had reached the clouds it had been hauled in. Then she stopped, just under the clouds, and the vast crowd, knowing intuitively what was to come, began to surge to and fro with wild yells and hoarse shouts of terror, for the rescue had been achieved after all, and the moment of revenge had come.

(To be continued.)

A NEW YEAR'S CALL

THEY both lived in "Victoria Mansions" on the top floor, where the rooms were small and comparatively cheap. They were always coming up in the lift together, and she had looked at him and wondered if he was ever in love; and he had looked at her and wondered whether any man came to see her. The day after Christmas they got into the lift together with three other people, but the others all got out on the lower—and more expensive—floors, and then she carefully looked at the blank walls sliding by them, and he looked at her till the lift stopped at the top floor, and he, with an awkwardness that was entirely uncharacteristic, knocked all her bundles out of her hands as he stepped back to let her out first.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Arnott," he said, as he stooped and scrambled for them, and, the light of successful strategy in his eyes, he added:

"I suppose I ought to apologise for knowing your name—but, you see, I do know it—the last one, that is."

"Thank you," said Miss Arnott, as she took the last lingeringly delivered bundle, and the lift door banged and the lift boy sank behind them.

"I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," said he.

"You should say a Happy New Year and a Merry Christmas, for it's too late to wish anything for this year's Christmas," she said, dimpling and making talk out of nothing. Then she suddenly grew gravely courteous, and murmured "Thank you" again, and bowed and hurried down the passage.

"Well, it's a beginning, and it's nonsense not having some acquaintance with a nice girl like that when she's right under your elbow," he said to himself, as he turned his key in his door. After he had seated himself for an after-dinner cigar he moralised on the idiotcy of the conventions that put it out of his power to call on Miss Arnott, tell her he was a respectable person with an uncle who was vicar of the Church of the Holy Bulrushes, and that he'd like to know her—without ulterior motives.

"But that's the row," he said to himself; "this idea of matrimony so fills up everybody's mind that you can get no pleasant companionship with women because you are supposed, of course, to have intentions, or not to have them, and then you are a bold, bad man. I can't tell Miss Arnott that my intentions are perfectly honourable, but also absolutely non-matrimonial: and although she looks like an uncommonly clever girl, she'd probably never get so far past her education as to dream of such a novel position on the part of a man who knocks bundles out of her hands to get to speak to her. But, by Jove, if she only knew it, I've got such a simple human loneliness on me I'd go out of my way to talk to that old dowager on the first floor with the glass eye."

Miss Arnott was saying to herself, while she made herself a cup of tea: "I wonder what he'd have thought if I had said: 'Thank you, Mr. Noyes'; that would have been rather funny, but then he might have thought it was rather fast, too. I shall not notice him next time I see him. That's the only safe and proper thing."

She felt so pious in having made this resolution that she felt bound to show how sincere it was by carefully listening at her door the next morning till she heard his shut, and knew he was waiting at the lift; then she came out of her room just as the boy opened the lift door, and called out: "Oh, never mind, don't wait; I've forgotten something," and went back.

That was to show Mr. James Noyes (she knew his first name), that she was not seeking to go down with him.

"She doesn't want me to forget all about her, anyway," said that misguided young man in his own mind.

Before New Year's Day they were bowing ceremoniously when they met, and he was watching for a chance to knock more bundles out of her hands in the pursuit of a platonic friendship. She went to the Church of the Holy Bulrushes to watch the old year out—though she never had been there before. She knew more by that time about Mr. Noyes' antecedents and present position as a promising young architect of limited performance than he did himself, and what she thought on not seeing him at church, and so not receiving his humble suit to see her home, was that while he might be a pleasing person to know, she pitied the woman he might marry—he was evidently of a very light and fickle nature—and his legs were too thin. After that she quite dismissed him from her thoughts, and began speculating on putting a midnight New Year's service into her next story—for she wrote stories and had come to London to live for fame and to pick up her bread and butter

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incidentally. She was young for the lonely position she occupied, and pretty, but, despite the little wondering feminine vagaries of her mind, she was solely convinced that a life of celibacy was the one calculated to nourish her genius, and that to nourish her genius was her duty.

New Year's morning she got up thinking about all the social festivity she had heard of on that day. She was so belated that she did not know that New Year's calls were out of date. She felt a pathetic figure when she reflected that there was no one to call on her. She knew no one but two or three editors, who felt they had munificently fulfilled all social obligations to a promising contributor when they had asked her to something known as a literary reception, and had let her look at their lions and talk to vague young men connected with publishing houses. She had even always come home with a messenger boy—at her own expense—and, to her simple provincial mind, literary receptions had seemed to imperfectly represent the pleasures of the world.

To-day she felt a longing to be gay, just as gay as if she had no genius to nourish, to wear good clothes, and look pretty, and listen to silly compliments.

"No one will call; no one can call, of course. It would be the most presumptuous thing in the world for Mr. Noyes to think of such a thing, and I don't believe he's so far gone in rudeness as that," was one train of thought in her mind, and the next was to conclude that, as she was so lonely and it was so dreary to be lonely on New Year's Day, she'd play she was going to receive, and she'd dress herself nicely and get out a bottle of sherry and buy a cake, "just as if I were a little girl and could pretend anything I wanted to, and have it almost as good as true," she said to herself.

Mr. James Noyes shaved himself pensively as he reflected that his choice for a New Year's dinner lay between the house of the vicar of the Church of the Holy Bulrushes and a restaurant. "You can't always be going to a preacher's house for dinner if you never go to hear him preach," ran his thoughts, "and anyhow one's about as dismal as the other. Then that red-headed daughter of his will marry me before I know it, if I don't look sharp. It's that kind of thing that makes you reconciled to girls like Miss Arnott going in for a career and all that."

It was about noon when Miss Arnott got her preparations for the reception of imaginary visitors completed. The sherry was one of half a dozen bottles that an old bachelor uncle had sent her for Christmas. She had not opened it because to drink wine alone seemed to her sadder than to have the wine. like the company fashioned of thin air.

She had cake and a tea service laid out, and she had dressed herself in an old white muslin gown because it was becoming, though darned, and strung herself over with beads like a fancy shop window because they were becoming too, and she loved them, and she did not intend to allow any imaginary woman to come near her, for she knew she could not prevent even imaginary women from saying she looked silly—but imaginary men might be trusted to admire.

As she gave a touch to her curtains that they might admit her glimpse of the Park and at the same time shut out the sight of a neighbouring wall that advertised liver pills, there came a knock at her door; she opened it, fearing it was the washerwoman, and there stood Mr. Noyes, with his overcoat on, his hat in one hand, and a kitten in the other.

"I found your property straying in forbidden paths," said he, holding out the animal.

"Why—I—dear me, the idea. It was very kind of you to bring her home. Come to me this minute, you naughty Toodles," said the lady, with that remarkable feminine social tact one reads about, for she had never laid eyes on the cat till that moment.

Noyes appreciated it, for he had just bought the cat at a shop down the street.

"I see you are receiving," said he.

"Yes; won't you come in?" said she.

"I'm just starting on my rounds," said he, "and I'm glad to make so charming a beginning."

While they were attending to these lies, the kitten, put down on the floor, was dragging herself about, legs bent, in a most unhappy manner. Looking for conversational material, Miss Arnott exclaimed:

"Dear me! what is the matter with that cat? How oddly she behaves." She hated cats, and knew nothing about them.

"Why, cats always do that in a strange place," said the male diplomatist, and then he turned very red. The two stared at each other, and then laughter broke forth and the acquaintance was an accomplished fact.

"I'm not receiving," cried Ada, when she got her breath. "I'm not going to tell any more fibs to-day. This is all just a little play I got up because I was so lonely; I was 'making believe,' as the children do."

"Poor little thing," murmured Jim Noyes, so low that no one was obliged to pretend to hear him. Then he said: "And I'm not making calls. I've called on you, but then, you see, officially I don't know you."

"Officially you are only a figment of my imagination, but I always wanted real bread and meat for my dolls, so you must have some real sherry, and you'll have to help uncork it."

It was an hour before the young man suggested that New Year's calls must have an end.

"I'll have to have make-believe visitors the rest of the day," said Ada.

"And I'll have to make make-believe calls, and, what's worse, make-believe eat and drink, for I'm not going to have any dinner till after the theatres are out."

"Why—why not?"

"Oh, dining alone in a restaurant on a holiday is so dismal at the best, and I'm going to wait till they are at their brightest with supper parties of happier people."

"Then you'd better make another call here, and help yourself through the interval with some more cake."

"And will you play that I am a dozen different young men, each more brilliant and entertaining than the other?"

And so the afternoon of New Year's Day was entered upon. So far the game had been played by the man and the girl and Nature, but now Fate stepped in.

Ada lit a match to set light to the gas, and while she talked and held the match and forgot about it, the blazing end fell off and dropped upon the last summer's muslin dress, and light flames shot up round her. Noyes caught his overcoat from a chair, sprang and wrapped it round her, and the danger was over in a disgustingly brief time; still it had done its work, and the two strangers were left in a highly intimate attitude, the girl sobbing hysterically, and both with their emotions loosened by a genuine taste of peril.

"Darling!" said he, smoothing her hair, and the word seemed to have said itself without any collusion on the part of his brain.

"Oh!" said she, and hid her face on his shoulder, and he murmured some more words that surprised him, and kissed her hair, and her ear, and a bit of her cheek, in a dazed and helpless way.

When she lifted her face it was to say: "And we haven't been introduced yet; you'll have to get your uncle to do it I go to his church."

And with that remark Mr. Noyes felt—he didn't stop to think why—that his fate was sealed, and that it was rather nice after all. What he said was: "We'll get him to do it all," and though the remark was a little blind, the girl seemed to understand it.

"We turn over our new leaf with the New Year to some purpose," he said, as they sat in the twilight and neglected to light the gas.

"It will be turned over when we are introduced," said she. "I don't approve of free-and-easy ways about such matters; I never did."

And Noyes himself, though now more than half persuaded that he had done just what he meant to, is himself not so sure as he once was, that conventionality spies dangers where there are none, and he takes satisfaction in the entire propriety of Ada's views, and accepts her conduct as a special compliment to himself. She tells him how he fell in love with her before he ever spoke to her, and that they met at his uncle's. the vicar's.

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THE NOAH'S ARK CHAP.

E allus used to larf at that there curate chap—the bloke with the corpsy face, and the holler eyes, with the soft 'at and the long cloak, just like one o' them Johnnies they puts in Noah's Arks. In our alley, Marrerbone Alley, Rotherithe, we didn't used to care about 'im a comin' down an' tellin' us what was right and what wasn't, and a doin' the soapy business along o' the kids and the old women, and playing the goody-goody fake all about.

So each time we see 'im a comin', with 'is cloak and 'is 'at, and 'is shoes, and 'is white stockings, and 'is rumbereller, and 'is trac's, me and Blue Peter and Tom Stepney, and Pat Mulrooney, and others, we used to make game on 'im, and now and then a bit 'o dirt, or a heggshell, or somethink would ketch him, and we'd arsk 'im rare questions, and call 'im all kinds o' names, and make game on 'im generally.

D'ye think that stopped 'im from comin' down Marrerbone Alley? Not 'im. He come down just as usual, and don't seem to mind no more about the chaff and the heggshells than he did about the rain, or the snow, or the stinks, or the dirt. More'n that he gits 'old of Pat Mulrooney one day, an' he talks to him and tells him straight as 'ow he oughter be ashamed on 'isself for hilltreatin' a man as was doin' his dooty, an' when Tom Stepney comes up, meanin' fun, Noah's Ark turns round to him, and gives him as good as he got, speakin' quiet like and cool and never turnin' a 'air, although Tom and Pat is nasty chaps in a row, and—well, we let 'im alone after that, for he was a good plucked 'un, although he 'ad a soft 'at and a long cloak, and carried a rumbereller, and chucked the trac's around like a bill-poster.

It was a precious hard Christmas time for us in Marrerbone Alley—as 'ard as I can mind, and the Lavender Basin was froze over, and there wasn't no work and me and the others was a settin' idle and doin' nothink, and the women and kids was bad off for fire and grub and everythink. There was a kid died at Number Four—died o' cold, they said—but there was others as bad off, and no one couldn't pass down the halley without 'earin the cryin' for food or for fire. Them as 'ad bread was well off; them as 'ad meat, no, I mean 'im as 'ad meat, for there warn't only one, was a proper dook.

I've lived in that there halley ten year, but I never mind it's bein' so quiet. Somehow folk 'adn't the 'eart to fight or talk, and John Robinson, the slop, what in general just put 'is boots in the halley and go on, it was so quiet 'e came hall the way down it, thinkin' as 'ow there must be somethink wrong, and didn't seem to be at all 'isself at not bein' called a name or two, or gettin' a slop pail over 'im. This lasted a matter o' a fortnit, and things were beginnin' to look so black that me and Pat and Tom Stepney and some more on 'em went out on the singin' lay, with spades on our showelders, and all this bad time Noah's Ark never come nigh us.

"Jes' like them passons," says we; and we got a kind o' mad with 'im, not that 'is preachin' and trac' givin' could warms 'ands and feed hemptiness, but there was soup tickets an' things in 'is give, and he'd ha' come down the halley 'andy like. "I'll bet yer a pot o' black and tan," says I to Tom Stepney, "that there Noah's Ark will 'ave a fust-rate Christmas dinner nex' week, and be 'anged to hus chaps and our women and kids in the halley." "That's so," said Tom. "What dy'e say to lookin' on 'im up!"

But we was saved that trouble, for the werry next day who should come down the halley but Noah's Ark 'isself. But he warn't the same as he was. He was uncommon pale, and his heyes was bright and in mournin' like all round, and he'd a woollen fakement round his throat, but the same cloak, and soft 'at, and shoes with white stockings.

So I told him straight—I 'ad meant to tell him proper, but I 'adn't the 'eart to when I see them heyes o' his, and 'ow he ketched his breath; so I told him straight as 'ow things was bad, and never a soul'd ben down the halley since he came, and there wasn't no bread, let alone a two-eyed steak or a bit o' block ornament, and that there wasn't no coals, and that the women was ailin', and the kids dyin'.

Noah's Ark looks very queer, and fidgets with them big shoes of his, and turns his 'ed away, and blessed if I didn't see his lips a workin', and his eyes a gettin' moist. "I'm—I'm very, very sorry," he says. "I'll do all I can to help you. I'm afeard it ain't much, but I'll do my best. No bread, eh? No coals, eh?" and off he walks as if someone had struck him. That werry same evenin' there was bread and meat and coals in hevery 'ouse in the halley.

Next week were Christmas week. Me and Tom Stepney got a job at the Bricklayers' Harms Station, 'elping of the 'ands there to take the 'ampers and things from the railway trucks, and loadin' them on the railway vans. My eye! some on 'em was 'ampers, and no mistake, and I says to Tom Stepney, says I, "Tom, there's a halley we knows on where one o' these yere 'ampers wouldn't come amiss, eh, mate?"

All of a sudden I ketches 'old of one, a werry big un it were, and it had a ticket on it, and on the ticket whose name do I see but Noah's Ark's, and above it a crown with knobs on it, and the name printed of some castle or other?

"Noah's Ark's in luck," says I to Tom; "he'll have a Christmas dinner anyway."

Well, two days before Christmas, Noah's Ark comes down the halley. "Look 'ere," he says, "I've got a treat for the lot of you. Hevery man, woman, and child here is to be at the mission 'ouse at twelve o'clock sharp to-morrer. Don't bring anythink," he says, "but clean faces and 'ands, and good happytites."

Then he walked away, coughin' like mad, and hus all a wonderin' what the lay was.

We was there, you take your Alfry Davy, at twelve o'clock sharp on Christmas Eve. There was nigh on forty on us, men, women and kids, and there was Noah's Ark and his lady and miss, and 'alf-a-dozen other gentry, and there was two long tables with white cloths on 'em, and jugs and glasses, and then Noah's Ark 'ammers the table, and axes us all to stand, and he puts in a prayer, and then—well, I never 'ad sich a feed, nor 'adn't anyone else, let alone perhaps Mrs. Lockyer, what 'ed been in service.

"Tom," says I to Stepney, "blessed if Noah's Ark ain't give us that there 'amper with the nobby crown on the ticket."

Next day was Christmas Day, and we'd been talking about the blow out, a lot on us, and we says as 'ow some on us had oughter call on Noah's Ark and thank 'im and wish 'im merry Christmas, and tell 'im how we'd sorter misunderstood 'im, and ax 'is parding. So we goes, me and Tom Stepney and Pat Mulrooney. Noah's Ark lodged hover a saddler's shop, and when the saddler comes to the door and sees hus three chaps he looks huppish, and axes what we wants. So we tells 'im. "Can't see him," says he. "He's a eatin' of his Christmas dinner, what d'ye want for to hinterrupt 'im, same as you 'as me?"—which was true enough, for there was a bit o' pertater on his chin, and there was a plum puddin' a goin' into his room at the end of the passage.

But we goes up, and knocks at the door, and sure enough, there was Noah's Ark and his missis, and his four kids, a eatin' of their dinners.

It's gawspel truth as I'm tellin': Noah's Ark's Christmas dinner was polonies and bread and water. He'd give the halley 'is Christmas dinner!

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